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ABSTRACT

An organized volunteer program for parents and community members can be a valuable form of instructional and administrative support for schools as financial resources decline. The rationale for establishing such a parent/community program should be thoroughly probed, and possible constraints should be identified at the outset. Support from the school board, administration, and faculty, as well as from community groups, should be obtained in advance. A planning and advisory group is necessary to assess needs and set goals and objectives. The volunteers' roles and duties should be clearly defined in order to avoid staff misunderstandings. The school's legal and financial responsibilities should be delineated and understood by all participants. Implementation should consist of a thorough staff orientation and personalized volunteer recruitment, training, and retention methods. Program evaluation, often prepared as part of a funding request, should indicate objectives, criteria, and time frame of measurement. (FG)

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GETTING STARTED WITH PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

BY

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Advocates of school volunteers are in agreement that the utilization of volunteers enriches student experiences and heightens their motivation. Utilization frees educators from non-teaching tasks and assists in the provision of individualized instruction. It contributes assistance in the administration, supervision and instruction in education and explains the processes and problems of education to other citizens thus fostering continued community support and involvement.

It would appear that we are in an extended period of fiscal conservatism and increased program accountability. Volunteers can help strengthen the linkages between the schools and the community to bring about an increased responsiveness of educational programs to ever changing community needs. They can help to provide support services needed by students with special needs. They can further the development of the community's understanding of the purpose and potentials of the educational program and can serve as community advocates promoting increased support for education during this period of fiscal austerity. Schools can hardly operate without this great reservoir of help.

In a recent study of volunteer programs related to vocational schools which was conducted by Conserva, Inc., Raleigh, North Carolina and published this past May by Douglas F. Katz, entitled "Volunteers in Vocational Education - A Handbook for Program Development", the investigators defined 27 ways in which volunteers significantly assisted the schools in the four sites under consideration.

We are advocating the development of an ORGANIZED PROGRAM for volunteer involvement in education. In contrast to individual efforts to involve volunteers in educational programs, the establishment of a volunteer PROGRAM requires the management functions of program planning and design, implementation and operation of the program and monitoring and evaluation of program effectiveness. A volunteer program in education thus represents the concerted rather than fragmented efforts to involve volunteers in various capacities within the schools.

Important factors which characterize a volunteer program as contrasted with simple involvement of individual volunteers include the following:

1. An organized program is a group planning process.
2. A program has specific goals and objectives.
3. There is specific allocation of resources for an organized program.
4. There is planned orientation of staff and volunteers.
5. There are training opportunities for volunteers.
6. There is a negotiated commitment from volunteers.
7. In an organized program, volunteers are supervised.
8. There is identity and image in an organized program.

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9. There is formal and informal evaluation of accomplishments.
10. There is top administrative approval and support.
11. In an organized program there is diversity of volunteer assignments.
12. There are formally developed policies, practices and procedures.
13. There are materials describing the volunteer program.
14. There is continuity and continuation of the program from year to year in an organized program.

Citizen involvement in schools can be initiated by anyone in the community, a parent, the schools, an organization, or an interested private non-parent citizen. The most common beginning is with school/parent personnel. Whoever begins the program must understand that if the program is to be lasting and effective there are certain steps that must be followed. There are many planning models. There are some variations, however in setting up a parent/citizen involvement program.

I. The first question that needs to be asked as an initiator becomes interested in starting a parent/citizen involvement program is: "WHY DO WE NEED IT?" Some possible responses are:

1. To enrich student experiences
2. To heighten student motivation
3. To free educators from non-teaching tasks
4. To assist in the provision of individualized instruction
5. To contribute assistance in the administration, supervision and instruction in the schools
6. To explain the processes and problems of education to other citizens thus fostering continued community support and involvement

At the same time it would be wise to investigate and list the reasons why volunteer programs might not work. Some of these might include:

1. Too much effort is required to set up and maintain a dynamic program.
2. It may be a threat to teachers.
3. There may be a lack of commitment on the part of the members of the community.
4. There may be a feeling of "Why give it away when I can be paid for it."
5. There may be budget constraints.
6. There may be an unwillingness of people in position of power to see the value of a volunteer program which brings us to the next step.

II. SECURING SUPPORT. The next step in planning and getting started in a parent/citizen involvement program is securing support from the following:

1. Administration. It is important that administrative support at every level be solicited. Without the support of the appropriate administrators there is little chance of gaining the support of the schools, the instructors and potential volunteers, all of whom will be instrumental in planning and implementing a volunteer program.

2. School Board. Regardless of whether or not educational funds will be allocated to the volunteer program school board approval of the program is necessary.

3. Faculty. There must be faculty support. The idea of establishing a volunteer program could be threatening to some members of a faculty. They may be concerned that the involvement of volunteers will weaken their bargaining position, that volunteers will be used to replace paid staff or that volunteers will be assigned to faculty members who do not wish to become involved in a volunteer program. Faculty support for the volunteer program can be enhanced by involving them throughout the planning process, by convincing them that the program will be responsive to their needs and by emphasizing how volunteers can contribute to the quality of the total program.

4. Community. Community support is necessary. Local organizations such as industry and education cooperation associations, trade and professional organizations, labor unions, chamber of commerce, volunteer action centers, urban coalitions, community action groups, community improvement councils, Parent-Teacher Associations and other community organizations can provide valuable community support to a volunteer program.

III. The next step is crucial and is often overlooked. Establish a PLANNING ADVISORY GROUP. Representatives on this task force committee would probably include educational administrators teachers, representatives of local volunteer organizations, business, industrial representatives, local government, organized labor, community organizations, service clubs, minority groups and other interested members of the community.

At the outset the purpose of the task force would be to provide advice on the feasibility and implications of operating a volunteer program. In order to utilize an advisory group effectively it is important that the group be given a clear statement of its purpose, the work expected of it and an understanding of the limits or extent of its authority.

IV. ASSESSING NEEDS. The main purpose of the planning advisory group would be to assess the need of the schools for volunteer assistance. The initial task of the task force would be to translate the general feeling that a volunteer program is desirable into more clearly defined needs of the educational program. This can best be accomplished by conducting an assessment of the program's needs which include the needs of students, teachers, administration and support staff.

In conducting a needs assessment it is important that representatives of all relevant groups be asked to participate in the identification of needs. One of the roles and functions of the advisory group would be to identify the potential needs that can be anticipated throughout the community. These needs should be consolidated and condensed to brief but understandable statements and presented in a check-list method to all relevant groups that will allow each individual to review the data and make decisions and give opinions in the least amount of time. There must always be provisions for comments and responses to the items listed.

V. The next step in getting started is the development of program GOALS AND OBJECTIVES. Developing the initial goals and objectives can be performed by a subcommittee or a task force of ten or fewer persons selected from among the members of the advisory committee. The goals and objectives should be consistent and compatable with each other and with the philosophy of the school district. The goals and objectives should be appropriate and realistic. The goal statement should designate what is to be accomplished and the general purpose or intent of the goal. Objective statements should designate specific targets, time frames, and results that lend themselves to specific determination to the extent to which they are achieved.

VI. DEFINITION OF ROLES. Once the goals and objectives have been established, roles, duties, and responsibilities of the volunteers must be defined. One of the central issues which must be addressed in planning the volunteer program is the extent to which the volunteers will be performing duties which would otherwise be performed by paid personnel or not be performed at all. This issue must be considered when defining the roles and duties of volunteers. Staff acceptance of the program is likely to be greatest where the role of the volunteer is clearly defined so as not to impose a threat to paid personnel. Volunteer roles, for definitions purposes, can be broken down into two areas: instructional support and administrative support.

1. Instructional support includes provision of class or laboratory skills instruction under the supervision of the certificated teacher. It includes provision of specialized instructional support for disadvantaged, handicapped, or limited English speaking students. It includes assistance in the development of curriculum and instructional materials, provision of tutorial assistance, supervising student progress, identification of potential behavior and safety problems around the school. It also includes evaluation of student work samples and serving as resource persons in various classes. Instructional support volunteers can make special presentations of interest to instructors and students, can lead field trips and provide training for students and school staffs outside of the school.

2. Administrative support services may be to help in the continuing development of needs assessments, on-going inventories of community resources, promotion of coordination between the schools and community agencies. Administrative support also includes assessing the community support for the schools, evaluating the impact of education programs, developing community support and assistance in the collection, processing, and reporting of educational data.

VII. SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITY. Another step in the development of an involvement program would be to deliniate the responsibilities of the schools. One of the school's initial responsibilities will be to extend its accident and liability insurance to include volunteers. If volunteers will be transporting students or other volunteers, secondary automobile insurance should be provided by the district. Some of the other responsibilities that fall to the schools are:

1. To prepare staff members to accept and respect the volunteers as a co-worker.
2. To provide orientation and training to the volunteer.
3. To provide jobs that are meaningful to the volunteer.
4. To be alert for volunteers with special needs or talents.
5. To give the prospective volunteer the same attention in regard to placement as the paid employee.

6. To make it possible for volunteers to serve on a trial or probationary basis.
7. To realistically outline the time, skills, and needs or carrying out the proposed job.
8. To provide an adequate, pleasant work space and clear instructions.
9. To accept the volunteer as part of the team and include the volunteer in training and relevant staff meetings.
10. To involve the volunteer to extend services so more can be done with time and budget limitations.

A school district which initiates a volunteer program should be prepared to pay, in addition to the costs associated with the volunteer program director's salary and fringe benefits, costs associated with providing the director with office furniture, equipment, telephone service, postage, routine office supplies, secretarial and clerical assistance and local travel reimbursement. Other costs which may need to be budgeted include insurance coverage for volunteers, travel reimbursement for volunteers, printing costs, promotional materials, special events such as a volunteer recognition program, seminars and workshops, publications and miscellaneous expenses that arise from day to day that enhance a volunteer program.

In dealing with a program's costs it should be noted that there are a number of funding sources that should be considered. Certainly, tax monies serve as a major source of funding but there are other sources. Private foundations and corporations are other possibilities for funding the program. Particulary during its developmental and initial implementation phases. In general, foundation support is for innovative educational activities on a short term basis so continued funding would have to come from other sources.

VIII. The next step in our process planning for this service is IMPLEMENTATION. Implementation involves staff orientation which should be designed with the following purposes in mind:

A. Orientation

1. To acquaint the staff of the school with the goals and structure of the volunteer program.
2. To define areas of curriculum or program activities which can be carried out by volunteers under professional supervision.
3. To equip staff members with techniques for fostering sound interpersonal relationships with volunteers.
4. To interest staff members in in-service training and assistance as they work with volunteers.
5. To explain the needs for meaningful evaluation leading to the improvement of volunteer programs.
6. To enable the staff to know the roles of volunteers
7. To help the staff understand the benefits that can be realized through the involvement of volunteers.

8. To outline the services that will be provided by the volunteer program staff.
9. To help the staff become aware of how volunteers will be recruited, screened, selected and trained.
10. Provide pre-service instruction for teachers who will be working with volunteers.
11. Help the staff to understand their responsibilities for working with volunteers.
12. To develop means for providing growth opportunities for volunteers.
13. Explain how problem resolution procedures will be conducted.
14. Explain how the program will be evaluated.
15. Help the staff to identify needs for volunteer services.
16. Develop the means for providing student orientation to volunteers.

One of the chief functions of the staff orientation will be the identification of specific needs for volunteer assistance. Teachers will usually be the ones actually using the volunteers and they should have ample input in the development of volunteer job descriptions. As a result of the orientation, each staff member should be requested to identify how they could use volunteer service and should be asked to fill out a request for volunteer service. These requests should come from staff members who are fully aware of the purpose and goals of the program. Requests should be realistic with specific requirements and time frame needs outlined.

B. Recruitment. The next step in the implementation of the program is recruitment of volunteers. As we recruit, it is important for us to understand why people volunteer. Marlene Wilson, in her book, "The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs," has identified the following reasons why people volunteer:

1. The desire to utilize special knowledge and skills
2. The need for a sense of security that results from feeling one's life has purpose, meaning, and significance
3. The need to be a part of activities that have neighborhood, community, regional or national importance
4. The desire to help others
5. The desire for recognition and status
6. The need to feel useful and needed
7. An interest in learning new skills and participating in enjoyable and rewarding activities
8. The desire to gain visibility and skills that will help advancement in employment and social areas
9. The need to actively utilize leisure time and reduce loneliness, isolation and pressure.

There are three ways to recruit people; individual approaches, group approaches, and public approaches. One report by Richard Hooper in 1976 found that volunteers who participated in school volunteer programs first learned of the program from the following sources:

1. A letter from the school
2. From a friend
3. A call from the volunteer office
4. From the newspaper
5. From television

In 1981 the Gallup organization, in polling people on this question found that 44% first became involved because someone asked them to be a volunteer, 29% had a family member or a friend involved in the activity or benefited from it, 31% became involved through their participation in an organization or group. Only 6% of the sample first learned about the volunteer activity through radio, television or printed sources.

By far, the most effective method is the individual approach such as a personal contact, telephone calls, word of mouth, school letters, direct mailings, door-to-door canvasing, small group meetings in homes or at school.

The group appraoch includes giving speeches, distributing brochures, having open-houses, preparing bulletin boards, etc.

Public methods include providing bumper stickers, radio and television spot announcements, newspaper ads, posters, exhibits and outdoor advertising.

C. Screening/Training. After the recruiting process is on-going, it is important to have inplace a screening and selection program, an orientation and training program for the volunteers. The purposes of these orientation sessions are basically the same as those outlined for the staff.

D. Retention. A plan for the retention of volunteer should be established. Basically, this involves developing ways of expressing appreciation which might be expressed in the following ways:

1. Asking the volunteers for advice on problems
2. Taking time to talk with the volunteers and listen to him/her
3. Inviting the volunteer to attend staff meetings
4. Expanding the volunteer's responsibilities commensurate with his/her capacities, capabilities and interests
5. Sharing books, journals, magazines, etc. with the volunteer
6. Offering the volunteer rides when he/she has transportation problems
7. Taking part in less desirable tasks with the volunteer
8. Sending a get well card or birthday card
9. Defending the volunteer against hostile or negative staff or students

10. Treating the volunteer to a lunch or a soft drink or coffee
11. Alerting the volunteer to upcoming school or community events which might be of interest to him/her
12. Simply saying "Thank You, you did a great job."

There are formal ways of saying thanks, too, by awarding special citations, conducting community wide recognition events, planning recognition newsletters, awarding plaques, planning annual ceremonies and also providing scholarships to volunteer conferences or workshops.

IX. EVALUATION. We must plan for program evaluation. A tentative plan for evaluating the success of the program should be developed prior to preparing any formal request for funding the volunteer program. Such a plan would indicate the objectives of the volunteer program, how the objectives are to be measured and the anticipated time frame for measuring the achievement of the objectives.

In the initial planning and discussion that we have gone through, it is important to remember that when the needs assessment demonstrates a particular need, it is not necessary to re-invent the wheel. There are many volunteer and involvement programs in place and functioning effectively throughout the nation. A great deal of time and effort can be saved by surveying successful programs and borrowing those that would tend to meet the volunteer needs of a particular community.

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